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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 002573

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#) [PARM](#) [NL](#) [RU](#) [OSCE](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: MINSK GROUP CO-CHAIRS BRIEF CIO DE HOOP SCHEFFER,
MEET AZERBAIJANI AND ARMENIAN FOREIGN MINISTERS

Classified By: Political Counselor Mary E. Daly for reasons 1.5 (b and d)

1. (C) Summary: In Paris October 2, the Minsk Group Co-Chairs held separate discussions with the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers, urging the two sides to quickly arrange meetings between the two presidents and announcing their desire to visit the region soon after the Azeri elections. FM Oskanian welcomed the Co-Chairs at any time, while Azerbaijani FM Guliyev tentatively suggested early November depending on the outcome of the elections. Guliyev was unable to commit to an early meeting of the presidents. The Co-Chairs also briefed OSCE Cio de Hoop Scheffer September 30 in the Hague on the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations, emphasizing the need for compromise by all parties and the importance of rapidly restarting talks stalled by presidential elections. The Co-Chairs recommended de Hoop Scheffer press the new Azeri president to initiate contact during his late October visit. End Summary.

Meeting with the Chairman in Office

2.(C) The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, accompanied by Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Trubnikov, briefed OSCE Cio de Hoop Scheffer September 30 on the current state of the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations. The Co-Chairs welcomed de Hoop Scheffer's recently announced decision to visit the region Oct. 29-30 (subsequently revised to Oct. 21 and 22), and urged him to press PM (and presumed President) Ilham Aliyev rapidly to restart negotiations with Armenia. They also stressed the need for the Cio to convince the Armenian government to take advantage of the post-election period in both Armenia and Azerbaijan by negotiating quietly and seriously. The Co-Chairs emphasized that no deus ex machina existed in the conflict--both sides need to make difficult compromises, and time is not/not on either side.

3.(C) OSCE Cio de Hoop Scheffer posed several questions relating to how the Azeri elections Oct. 15 would impact the peace process. The Co-Chairs emphasized the two presidential campaigns had almost stopped progress during the previous year. They noted that Azeri frustration with a perceived lack of progress in the negotiations could lead to an increasing level of violence along the line of contact. The Co-Chairs stressed they themselves were also frustrated by the cancellation of four planned visits to the region by one or the other side. They were cautious in discussing new proposals for the N.K. peace process, and wary of raising expectations too high. They pointed out that both sides are searching for "new ideas" providing magical solutions requiring neither compromise nor sacrifice. Ambassador Perina noted that the Co-Chairs do have some new ideas and approaches to discuss with both sides, but that the essential element for a settlement is the willingness of both sides to show flexibility and compromise. DFM Trubnikov urged de Hoop Scheffer to push the Azerbaijani side, post-election, to take the first step in restarting the peace process. Trubnikov argued that the Armenian side would be waiting until after the election for a signal from Azerbaijan to move forward.

Meetings with Armenian and Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers

4.(C) On October 2, the Co-Chairs held separate meetings in Paris with the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers. Their message to both ministers was similar: the Co-Chairs hoped to visit the region as soon as possible after the Azerbaijani elections where they will encourage both presidents to have an early meeting and offer to help facilitate such a meeting if the presidents agree. They would also suggest some new ideas and approaches for the presidents to discuss but present no formal new proposals at this time. The Co-Chairs stressed that an important window of opportunity would open with new mandates for both presidents and a new president on the Azerbaijani side. It was important to take advantage of this opportunity and not lose it through delay, tactical gamesmanship, or actions which might further damage the atmosphere between the two sides and make progress even more difficult. The Co-Chairs also gave each minister a suggested text concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for use at the OSCE Maastricht Ministerial in December and asked that they provide their views at an early point so that a text can be agreed prior to the ministerial meeting itself.

5.(C) Armenian FM Oskanian assured the Co-Chairs that Armenia was anxious to resume peace negotiations and that they would be welcome in Yerevan at any time. On the question of an early meeting between President Kocharian and the future Azerbaijani president, Oskanian said he was virtually certain that Kocharian would agree, and undertook to secure Kocharian's agreement within a week. Oskanian urged the Co-Chairs to try and convince the new Azerbaijani president to resume negotiations at the point at which they had been suspended, or at least to take the experience of the last ten years of negotiations into account, rather than seeking to begin talks from a blank state.

6.(C) Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Guliyev stressed that he was constrained in responding to the Co-Chairs, since the question of who would be president was still undecided and he did not know if he would still be foreign minister in a few weeks. Nonetheless, he said that he assumed the new president would want an early meeting with the Co-Chairs, and suggested that they tentatively plan to visit Baku sometime between November 5 and 10. As regards an early meeting between the new president and Kocharian, Guliyev said that Kocharian enjoyed an advantage by already having a government in place, while the new Azerbaijani president would need time to assemble his cabinet and formulate policy. An early meeting might be possible, but he (Guliyev) could make no promises on this. On the substance of the peace process, Guliyev said only that experience had shown that the Armenian wish for a comprehensive settlement was impossible, and that any successful settlement had to respect Azerbaijani territorial integrity and be based on a step-by-step approach.

7.(C) While Oskanian was for understandable reasons more receptive to an early meeting between the two presidents than Guliyev, he admitted that such a meeting might be strained and difficult particularly if -- as is most likely -- the Azerbaijani president-elect is Ilham Aliyev. Oskanian said that Kocharian and Ilham have had no prior bilateral meetings and have seen one another only at multilateral gatherings. At the recent CIS Summit in Yalta, which Aliyev attended in his capacity as Prime Minister, the two men had an inauspicious encounter. According to Oskanian (please protect), Aliyev objected to some changes requested by Shevardnadze to a text concerning Georgia. Kocharian then took issue with Aliyev, telling him in front of other leaders that it was the custom at CIS meetings to let each president have the final word on texts concerning that president's country. Aliyev dropped the matter but may well have felt embarrassed by the exchange.

8.(U) Ambassador Perina has cleared this cable.
SOBEL